



The massing and detailed stonework, illustrated in the dome elevation above and produced by Tourtellotte & Company in 1911, conveys both Tourtellotte's respect for tradition and his slightly idiosyncratic tendencies.



About the History of Idaho's Capitol

Architectural Precedents of the Idaho State Capitol

While much about the design of the Idaho State Capitol ties the building to the great architectural traditions of western culture, the use of the dome, the Capitol's distinguishing feature, suggests an affinity with an architectural tradition steeped in man expressing his finest inclinations. Before the use of structural steel simplified the design process, masonry domes were inherently challenging to build. Early use is the dome in ancient Roman Architecture inspired the greatest designers of the Italian Renaissance, hundreds of years later, to build bigger and bolder domed structures. Capping secular, public and private buildings, early Roman domes are the result of successful experimentation with concrete. Implementation culminated with the construction of the Pantheon designed by Decrianus during the second century A.D. Thirteen-hundred years later, the Catholic Church commissioned buildings intended to express the centrality, strength and longevity of its institutions. During the sixteenth century, the Church commissioned architects to design domed cathedrals, many of which were to become the seminal architecture of the Italian Renaissance. St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, designed by Michelangelo as the papal seat, was pre-eminent among these buildings. As the influences of the Renaissance were transmitted throughout Europe, evolving into the effervescent structures of the Baroque, great domed buildings continued to function ecclesiastically but were also put into secular service by the wealthy for use in private residences and estates.

With the European settlement of North America, the cultural dissemination of this architectural form continued across the Atlantic. Eventually, with the design and construction of the National Capitol in Washington, D.C., the founders of the United States settled upon the symbolism of the domed structure to celebrate democratic accomplishment. In its various permutations, as the design evolved over time, the National Capitol had a great influence over the design of civic buildings as the settlement of the country expanded westward. Fueled by the influence of the French Ecole des Beaux-Arts as a training ground for American architects in the nineteenth century and the turn-of-the-century interest in the City Beautiful movement, by 1900, classically conceived domed structures were being widely built as civic institutions. Appropriated from its former ecclesiastical use, the dome became the primary nomenclature for the architectural expression of American democracy. As a result, architects, commissioned not only by the United States' government but also by numerous state administrators, designed domed buildings to house the judicial, legislative and executive branches of state and national government. Today, state capitols throughout the country, including Idaho's eagle-topped structure, remain the legacy of this tradition.